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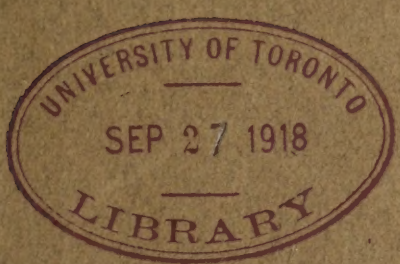
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Canadian Poets of the Great War

by

W. D. Lighthall, M.A., B.C.L., F.R.S.C.



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APPENDIX A

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

CANADIAN POETS OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

W. D. LIGHTHALL, M.A., B.C.L., F.R.S.C.

I must be pardoned for the far from original remark that a period of intense national exaltation is usually followed by a period of intense literary activity. The Augustan Age, the Medicean, the Isabellan, the Elizabethan, the Louis XIV, the Victorian—are they not common examples? Sometimes local difficulties have prevented the sequence, such as in the United States after the Revolution, and in Canada after the migration of the Loyalists—though in the end these movements have produced profound effects in thought and expression; for even if the "Great American novel," and the Great Canadian one, be still missing, the traditions of Independence and of United Empire have both been vastly fruitful. It is fair to prognosticate an intense literary activity in Canada, as well as elsewhere, in the near future, resulting from the Great War and it is well to scrutinize the straws in the wind even now, because that literary activity will not be merely a bookish matter, but a voice issuing out of our people's deepest soul.

What took place after that much less stirring, although momentous event, Confederation? Momentous, for Confederation made us a nation. By the way, it is amusing to hear every now and then that So-and-so "made Canada a nation." The feat has been attributed to at least a dozen different gentlemen by their admirers on fanciful grounds, from time to time; and to the C.P.R., and the McKinley tariff. But regarding even the superior claim of the Fathers of Confederation, had as many as two of them any real idea of the effects of what they were doing, beyond the solution of the old Provincial deadlock? Was it not only after the deed was done that the true scope of it began to dawn on our people?

The word "nation" itself is one used in too many senses, and needs some standardization by the British Academic Committee, or, in a suggestive way, by some such literary body as The Royal Society of Canada. At any rate a word used in so many confusing senses as "The Five Nations" for the Iroquois tribes; "la nation canadienne" for the French-Canadian race, in Lord Durham's Report, and its French sources; "le parti national" for the old Mercier Race Party in Quebec; "the British nation" for the people of the British Isles, and also for the British Imperial stock; "the Scotch nation", "the Irish nation," for two dialectic British provinces

represented in the Parliament of the United Kingdom; "the Imperial nation" for the British peoples at large, and "the Canadian nation" for that part of it municipally organized in Canada:—a word used in such a jumble of significations requires definition for any particular context. When therefore I say "Confederation made us a nation," what is meant by the word is, *a people brought together as a working political organism within a certain territory.* This by no means implies a sovereign state: Canada's nationhood is still a statehood in the United States of Britain, and perhaps sooner than we expect may, as part of the British Commonwealth, be combined with a different and larger quality still, of membership in the Federation of the World. Our ultimate nationality is humanity. I confess to have long had a hope of a larger Union between the British Empire, France and the United States. Anyway, Confederation lifted us out of the pettiness of provincialism. It brought us a territory larger than Europe to work in, and a wondrous ideal of what that new Europe might become for our seers to sing of.

Thus arose the Confederation School of Canadian poets. Why the prose writers lagged behind is another story. The compact and spirited message of lyric verse is doubtless the main secret of its influence in an age averse to long compositions and diluted thought. As the first anthologist of the Confederation poets, I had the privilege of intimate acquaintance with the principal men and women of the school and preserve their letters as valued treasures. Among them were John Reade, (now the delightful Dean of the guild), Archibald Lampman, Charles George Douglas Roberts, Bliss Carman, Charles Mair, Frederick George Scott, Hunter Duvar, William Wilfred Campbell, Dr. William Henry Drummond, Duncan Campbell Scott, John E. Logan, George Murray, George Martin, William McLennan, "Seranus," Ethelwyn Wetherald, Agnes Maule Machar, Pauline Johnson and Isabella Valancy Crawford. These appeared practically together like a flight of songbirds from the South in April, wafted in by some mighty wind of the spirit. The birthdates of most of them are within a few years of each other, not far from 1860. Roberts had the greatest promise. The new and spontaneous patriotic outburst of his

> "O Child of Nations, giant-limbed
> Who stand'st among the nations now"

evoked an immediate emotional response throughout the Dominion:

> "But thou, my Country, dream not thou.
> Wake and behold how night is done!—
> How on thy breast and o'er thy brow,
> Bursts the uprising sun!"

and again, his "Ode for the Canadian Confederacy," beginning:

"Awake! my country, the hour is great with change."

If the song of each of the poets of Confederation is analyzed we find in it the note of a new freedom and mastery—a cry which had been lacking before, of relief from the small provincial outlook, and a devotion to the beauty of this most beautiful of all lands. Archibald Lampman, for instance, seems at first sight to deal in themes and measures far away from national outlook. What have his titles, "Alcyone," "The Favorites of Pan," or, "The Story of an Affinity," to do with Canada? Or "The Frogs"—those "quaint uncouth dreamers, voices high and strange?"—by which he told me he really intended the tree-toads! But in that exquisite poem, what a picture of the charm of his country!

"And ever as ye piped, on every tree,
The great buds swelled; among the pensive woods
The spirits of first flowers awoke and flung
From their buried faces the close-fitting hoods,
And listened to your piping till they fell,
The frail spring-beauty with her perfumed bell,
The windflower, and the spotted adder-tongue."

After all, in his most distant excursions, he was working at the enrichment of Canadian life. In "Freedom," he turns to the Laurentians; painting in clear, firm tones the new wide land:

"Up to the hills, where the winds restore us,
Clearing our eyes to the beauty before us;
Earth with the glory of life on her breast,
Earth with the gleam of her cities and streams."

Lampman's amplest expression of his lovely and attractive soul,—for all who knew him loved him deeply—is his "Land of Pallas" that noble picture of the ideal country:

"A land where Beauty dwelt supreme; and Right, the donor
Of peaceful days, a land of equal gifts and deeds,
Of limitless fair fields, and plenty had with honor;
A land of kindly tillage and untroubled meads.

A land of lovely speech, where every tone was fashioned
By generations of emotion, high and sweet;
Of thought and deed and bearing lofty and impassioned;
A land of golden calm, grave forms and fretless feet.

There were no castes of rich or poor, of slave or master,
Where all were brothers and the curse of gold was dead;
But all that wise fair race to kindlier ends and vaster
Moved on together with the same majestic tread."

That "land of golden calm" was the ideal Canada, the new vision of the community to be, to which his full heart yearned, and to which he gave prophetic utterance.

Every one of the Confederation School instinctively contributed his share to the edifice, some more directly than others. Some were the landscape artists of our verse, some the historical composers, others the mystics, others refined musicians in the art of words. None composed with more Celtic passion of patriotism than our late colleague Wilfred Campbell. Of him one could always feel that he was the thoroughgoing poet, his own first convert to his message, untamed in soul, unapologetic for his art, the incarnation of noble earnestness, a despiser of ignoble things and ignoble men:

"Earth's dream of poetry will never die.
* * * * * * * *
Wrong cannot kill it. Man's material scheme
May scorn its uses, worship baser hope
Of life's high purpose, build about the world
A brazen rampart: through it all will come
The iron moan of life's unresting sea;
And through its floors, as filtered blooms of dawn,
Those flowers of dream will spring, eternal, sweet."

His lyric pictures are often most happy:

"Along the line of smoky hills,
The crimson forest stands;
And all the day the bluejay calls
Throughout the autumn lands."

And his "Lake Lyrics" are transcripts reflecting all the misty vastness of our inland seas. To him the best moral impulses we have came from our British ancestors, and present and future generations could not do better than treasure and build upon the deposit of British traditions.

"England, England, England,
Girdled by ocean and skies,
And the power of a world and the heart of a race,
And a hope that never dies.
England, England, England,
Wherever a true heart beats,
Whereever the glories of liberty grow,
'Tis the name that the world repeats.
* * * * * * *
Till the last great freedom is found,
And the last great truth is taught,
Till the last great deed is done,
And the last great battle is fought,
Till the last great fighter is slain in the last great fight,
And the warwolf is dead in his den,
England, breeder of hope and valor and might,
Iron mother of men."

The Confederation School indeed expressed something which was at the root of the chivalrous conduct of our young Canadians in the Great War. They both expressed and inspired it.

It would be very easy to trace the elements of the common task in the product of others of the school, but as two of the most eminent are among our own Fellowship, I shall quote a brief distinctive note from each.

Frederick George Scott wrote the following inscription for the Soldiers' Monument at Quebec:

"Not by the power of Commerce, Art or Pen
Shall our great Empire stand, nor has it stood,
But by the noble deeds of noble men,
Heroic lives and heroes' outpoured blood."

And from Duncan Campbell Scott may be chosen the exquisite sonnet:

OTTAWA

Before Dawn.

"The stars are stars of morn; a keen wind wakes
The birches on the slope; the distant hills,
Rise in the vacant North; the Chaudière fills
The calm with its hushed roar; the river takes
An unquiet rest, and a bird stirs, and shakes
The morn with music; a snatch of singing thrills
From the river; and the air clings and chills.

Fair in the South: fair as a shrine that makes
The wonder of a dream, imperious towers,
Pierce and possess the sky, guarding the halls,
Where our young strength is welded strenuously;
While in the East the Star of morning dowers
The land with a large tremulous light, that falls
A pledge and presage of our destiny."

The Great War is vastly more stirring as an era than Confederation was. We are passing through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and many of our sons have crossed the dark river itself and disappeared into the night. Fierce tests are forging men and will turn into our home life a stern and determined army, hating shams, not afraid of true revolutions, and accustomed to ideals, although singularly silent about them Momentous views and profound feelings have already begun to find some utterance here as well as in other allied lands. By examining the body of scattered verse from Canadian pens, we may hope to construct a dim picture of our coming poetic generation. Never mind the form. The mass must be regarded in the same light as those absorbing wash-and-pencil drawings, which come from the

front, whose interest lies in their transcript character—transcripts of hourly trial and danger; of incidents of battle; of sad and tragic partings with the dying brave; of regimental losses in the charge; of heroic merriment under the miseries and privations of the winter dugout, the cold, the flooded trenches and the Flanders mud.

Naturally, several of the surviving Confederation Poets overlap the nascent Afterwar School by treating of such themes. Frederick George Scott has served at the front as chaplain since 1914, has lost one son killed in action and has seen another part with an eye by a German bullet. Out of the fulness of his heart he has composed several of our finest poems on the war. Charles G. D. Roberts, who also holds a commission at the front, Duncan Campbell Scott, Wilfred Campbell, Mrs. Harrison ("Seranus"), Mrs. Isabella Ecclestone Mackay, and Miss Machar, have all contributed to the expression of war life. And Robert W. Service—who might be called a belated member of the Confederation School, because of his creation of the poetic Yukon—and Theodore Goodridge Roberts, son and literary pupil of his father Charles G. D. Roberts, are doing good work in France. All these writers of pre-war attainment are giving our war verse some of its first forms and part of its lines of impulse. By reason of their previous experience, they promptly seize some of its characteristics. Yet it is a question whether they do or do not have, in their previous training, a disadvantage as well as an advantage over the new writers who will be wholly inspired by the new era.

The Great War period itself must be regarded as a new starting point, the foundation of the After-War literary edifice.

What then do we find in this Great War period, now evidently shaped with considerable distinctness? Is it not the following qualities:

1. Dreadful experiences.
2. Supreme heroism.
3. Ideals of fidelity—chivalry, honor, patriotism to Canada, Empire, and humanity.
4. Hatred of Wrong.

From these have resulted self-confidence, intensity of convictions, directness of view, dignity and new outlook,—strong elements of impulse which are certain to lead to constructive action in the near future, and that action will, when it arrives at maturity in our national affairs, necessarily flow along the lines of those experiences, ideals and impulses.

Canon Scott, the heroic chaplain, always in the thick of danger and adored by the men, gives the following, among his "Poems written at the Front."

THE SILENT TOAST.

"They stand with reverent faces,
And their merriment give o'er,
As they drink the toast to the unseen host,
Who have fought and gone before.

It is only a passing moment,
In the midst of the feast and song,
But it grips the breath, as the wing of death
In a vision sweeps along.

No more they see the banquet,
And the brilliant lights around,
But they charge again on the hideous plain
When the shell-bursts rip the ground.

Or they creep at night, like panthers,
Through the waste of No Man's Land,
Their hearts afire with a wild desire
And death on every hand;

And out of the roar and tumult,
Or the black night loud with rain,
Some face comes back from the fiery track
And looks in their eyes again.

And the love that is passing woman's
And the bonds that are forged by death
Now grip the soul with a strange control
And speak what no man saith;

The vision dies off in the stillness,
Once more the tables shine,
But the eyes of all in the banquet hall
Are lit with a light divine."

Vimy Ridge, April, 1917.

In "Requiescant" he sees the same "unseen host."

"In lonely watches night by night,
Great visions burst upon my sight,
For down the stretches of the sky,
The hosts of dead go marching by.

Strange ghostly banners o'er them float,
Strange bugles sound an awful note;
And all their faces and their eyes
Are lit with starlight from the skies."

Robert W. Service, the "Red Cross Man," (who lost his brother, Lieutenant Albert Service, killed in action in 1916) has sought his subject with a sure instinct:

"OVER THE PARAPET"

"All day long when the shells sail over,
I stand at the sandbags and take my chance;
But at night, at night, I'm a reckless rover,
And over the parapet gleams Romance.
Romance! Romance! How I've dreamed it, writing
Dreary old records of money and mart,
Me with my head chock full of fighting,
And the blood of vikings to thrill my heart!

But little I thought that my time was coming,
Sudden and splendid, supreme and soon;
And here I am with the bullets humming,
As I crawl and I curse the light of the moon;
Out alone, for adventure thirsting!
Out in mysterious No Man's Land!
Prone with the dead when a star shell bursting,
Flares on the horrors on every hand."

Theodore Goodridge Roberts gives us such stanzas as this:

"A CANADIAN DAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1916."

"Steady they come, as those who had come in the morning,
Unshaken they passed where the bursting barrage was set;
They passed their victorious comrades; they passed to their goal—
The machine-gunned houses and gardens of Courcellette.

Into and through it, they flamed like fire through stubble;
With death before them, behind them, and swift in the air;
They struck stark fear to the hearts of the craven foemen;
With bomb and steel they dug the Boche from his lair.

September the Fifteenth. That was a day of glory,
With blood, with life, they captured the fortress town;
While far way, in the dear land they died for,
In frosty coverts the red leaves fluttered down."

Others of the older writers, who have not been at the front, have also been stirred by phases of the struggle. Duncan Campbell Scott has seen the vision of the aviator's soul in his Miltonic "Lines on a Canadian Aviator who died for his Country in France."

"But Death, who has learned to fly,
Still matchless when his work is to be done,
Met thee between the armies and the sun;
Thy speck of shadow faltered in the sky;
Then thy dead engine and thy broken wings
Drooped through the arc and passed in fire;
A wreath of smoke,—a breathless exhalation;
But ere that came, a vision sealed thine eyes,
Lulling thy senses with oblivion;
And from its sliding station in the skies
Thy dauntless soul upward in circles soared
To the sublime and purest radiance whence it sprang."

Robert Stanley Weir's "Treason" gives vigorous voice to the intense anger at traitors:

TREASON.

To.....

Because when your own Mother had sore need;
Because you knew it well and would not heed;
Because, though ruffians from the raging Rhine
Assailed with roar her very door;
You said Her quarrel is not mine.
Because of this:
Yours shall forever be a name to hiss!
* * * * *
Because not only have you failed to fight,
At Armageddon 'gainst all Devil's might;
But held your brothers back when they would go,
Blinding their eyes with dastard lies
So that they went not up against the foe;
Because of this;
Yours shall forever be a name to hiss."

His "Were You Not There?" is an equally stern arraignment of the slacker. And the true tone rings in Charles Twining, from whose numerous lyrics of the time we may quote:

WHO WIN THE FIGHT.

Yes, they have peace, as they have peace who wait,—
Returning, conquerors, from a distant field,
Upon the King, when every brow of state,
Against their coming, must its homage yield;
Or, as a savant, who has studied long
Framing a rich elixir, of such worth,
That, having found it, a triumphant song
Is his, for he has changed man's lot on earth;
Or as a youth, who, bending in the race
Beyond his fellows, stumbles at the goal;
What cares he if he slipped in his last place
When, winning, he has made his being whole?
And do they trouble that their breath may cease,
Who win the fight, when only such have peace?"

From Samuel Mathewson Baylis, author of the volumes "Camp and Lamp", and "At the Sign of the Beaver", come good fighting lines:—

"THOROUGHBRED."

All unafraid, as sire the seed,
Indomitable, undismayed,
Fronts the ringed teeth of mongrel breed
All unafraid.

'If few the greater honor paid!—
Adown the years our Henry's creed
Still fires high souls in arms arrayed.

Though eyes be dim and torn hearts bleed,
On! still unshaken, firmly stayed,
They greatly rise to greater need,
All unafraid!"

It would be invidious and inopportune to attempt a list of the others who have written well.

But the deepest interest lies in that often formless mass of new utterance which is welling up day by day hot from the lifesprings of the new generation. The famous lines of Lt.-Col. John McCrae, who lately died of pneumonia at the McGill Hospital, Boulogne, are inseparable from the Great War:

IN FLANDERS FIELDS.

In Flanders fields the poppies grow,
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing, fly;
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago,
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow;
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe,
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch. Be yours to lift it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies blow
In Flanders fields."

One of these dead in Flanders fields, Lieutenant Bernard Freeman Trotter, who was killed by a high explosive shell on May 7th, 1917,

wrote passages of lofty feeling. He exclaims while detained by ill health from enlisting:

O God, the blood of Outram in these veins
Cries shame upon the doom that dams it there
In useless impotence, while the red torrent runs
In glorious spate for Liberty and Right.
O to have died that day at Langemarck!
In one fierce moment to have paid it all!
The debt of Life to Earth and Hell and Heaven.
To have perished nobly in a noble cause,
Untarnished, unpolluted, undismayed,
By the dark world's corruption; to have passed,
A flaming beacon light to gods and men,
For in the years to come it shall be told
How these laid down their lives not for their homes,
Their orchards, fields, and cities; they were driven
To slaughter by no tyrant's lust for power;
Of their free manhood's choice they crossed the sea,
To save a stricken people from its foe
They died for justice. Justice owes them this;
That what they died for, be not overthrown."

And again:

"O happy dead, who sleep embalmed in glory,
Safe from corruption, purified by fire!
We shall grow old and tainted with the rotten
Effluvia of the peace we fought to win;
But you have conquered Time, and sleep forever,
Like gods with a white halo on your brows;
Your souls our lodestars, your death-crowned endeavour
The spur that holds the nations to their vows."

These words, written in France in April, 1917, were the last he wrote before he himself "conquered Time, and slept forever."

The verses from Lt. Peregrine Acland's Poem "The Reveille of Romance" which I am about to quote show the spirit of high resolve and the imaginative outlook which actuated those who sprang to arms at the first call. This spirit upheld many throughout the stress of the campaigns. The author, who wrote the lines at sea on his way to the front, proved himself a fine soldier, received the Military Cross, was promoted to the rank of Major and was severely wounded.

Regret no more the age of arms,
Nor sigh, "Romance is dead."
Out of life's dull and dreary maze
Romance has raised her head.

* * *

From East and West and South and North
The hosts are crowding still;
The long rails hum as troop-trains come
By valley, plain and hill;

And whence came yearly argosies
Laden with silks and corn,
Vast fleets of countless armed men
O'er the broad seas are borne.
* * *
Though warriors fall like frosted leaves
Before November winds,
They only lose what all must lose,
But find what none else finds.
Their bodies lie beside the way,
In trench, by barricade,
Discarded by the titan Will
That shatters what it made.
Poor empty sheaths, they mark the course
Of spirits bold as young;
Whatever checked that fiery charge
As dust to dust was flung.
For terrible it is to slay
And bitter to be slain,
But joy it is to crown the soul
In its heroic reign.
And better far to make or mar,
Godlike, but for a day,
Than pace the sluggard's slavish round
In life-long, mean decay.
* * *
Who sighs, then, for the Golden Age?
Romance has raised her head,
And in the sad and sombre days
Walks proudly o'er your dead.

The women have contributed largely. Mrs. Annie Bethune Macdougald speaks the gift of the mothers:

WAR DEBT.

Some pay the tax in riven gold,
But we in blood and tears,
Heart throbs, lone vigils, and passionate tendance through the years;
First bending low to cull the drifting smile of sleeping innocence incarnate
Then level, eye to eye, with love's divining glance,
Would read the riddle of the dawning man innate;
Held hostage still by roguish straight-limbed youth
And then with lifted eyes do we behold the flower
Of manly strength stand up above us
* * * * * * * *
And then, with miser fingers, we con the hoarded treasure of the years
And wonder, even as Mary, all human, all divine;
That all such fair investment of fine gold,
Should buy us but a crown of glistening, bitter tears.
* * * * * * *
'Tis thus we women pay."

Miss Helen Coleman, in her volume entitled "Marching Men—War Verses" has thoughts of

AUTUMN, 1917.

"Are there young hearts in France recalling
These dream-filled, blue Canadian days,
When gold and scarlet flames are falling
From beech and maple set ablaze?

Pluck they again the pale wild aster
The bending plume of golden-rod?
And do their exiled hearts beat faster,
Roaming in thought their native sod;

Dream they of Canada, crowned and golden,
Flushed with her autumn diadem.
In years to come, when time is olden,
Canada's dream shall be of them;

Shall be of them who gave for others,
The ardor of their radiant years;
Your name in Canada's heart, my brothers,
Shall be remembered long with tears."

Some of these poets have been inspired to verse for the first time in their lives. Miss Esther Kerry, a young lady of a well-known and gifted family of Montreal, who served in England as a V.A.D. nurse, wrote one day in London these happy lines:—

HE IS A CANADIAN.

"He is a Canadian—I wonder has he stood
In some thick forest, on a mountain slope,
Silent beneath a pine.
And looking out across a valley seen
Nothing but bristling tree trunks far below
And storm-scarred grey mountains
Whose snow-caps
Rise to a sunswept blue.

He is a Canadian—I wonder has he stood
On some still morning by a tiny lake
And watched the water ripple on the beach,—
One little clearing
In the mighty woods—
And know that he is first to breathe that air
Not weighted by a thousand lives and thoughts,
But rare and pure,
A breathing straight from God.

Oh, Canada, of bigness, beauty, strength,
Whom we thy wondering children know as ne'er before
In exile's retrospect of glorious hours,
We love thee with a love we never felt till now,
A love not all our own, a heritage
From those who to thy shores no more return.
Their love of thee, unconscious, pent,
Which drove them forth, they knew not why
And urged them on
All glad for thee to die
In this great love may we be consecrate
And made a nation new,
Strong as thy mountains,
Generous as thy plains,
Pure as thy winters,
And with depths unknown
As all thy forest lakes—
Still pools of peace."

And a lovely lament is the elegy "A Cry from the Canadian Hills" by Lilian Leveridge of Carrying Place, Ontario, over her young brother Frank, who died of wounds in France:

"Laddie, little laddie, come with me over the hills,
Where blossom the white May lilies and the dogwood and daffodils;
For the spirit of spring is calling to our spirits that love to roam;
Over the hills of home, laddie, over the hills of home.

Laddie, little laddie, here's hazel and meadow rue,
And wreaths of the rare arbutus ablowing for me and you;
And cherry and bilberry blossoms and hawthorn as white as foam;
We'll carry them all to mother, laddie, over the hills of home;

Brother, little brother, your childhood is passing by,
And the dawn of a noble purpose I see in your thoughtful eye.
* * * * * * *

Laddie, soldier laddie, a call comes over the sea,
A call to the best and bravest in the land of liberty,
To shatter the despot's power, to lift up the weak that fall;
Whistle a song as you go, laddie, to answer your country's call.

Brother, soldier brother, the spring has come back again;
But her voice from the windy hilltops is calling your name in vain;
For never shall we together, mid the birds and the blossoms roam,
Over the hills of home, brother, over the hills of home;
* * * * * * *

Laddie, Laddie, Laddie! How dim is the sunshine grown;
As Mother and I together speak softly in tender tone,
And the lips that quiver and falter have ever a single theme,
As we list for your dear lost whistle, laddie, over the hills of dream."

Many are expressing themselves in similar outbursts of utmost sincerity. Then there are ruder things of ballad type, with the ring of valor and the interest of truth:

"THE TAKING OF THE RIDGE"

(By Sapper J. T. Peck, C.E.F., 2005647).

'Twas a beast of a night. God! the mud
Up to our necks and red with blood,
Held fast like glue, both horse and gun—
That night the famous ridge was won.

For months we had stood a grilling fire
From Fritz's guns across the mire,
Our graveyards grew mid the bursting shell,
The living breathed and tasted hell.

Mud—the cursed Flanders mud:—
Up to our necks and red with blood
Barred the way to that coveted ridge
Where the heaping corpses made a bridge.

O'er No Man's Land, a bog of hell.
A seething mass of hissing shell,
Lit by the tongues of a thousand guns;
Our brave lads dashed to meet the Huns.

On, on through the mud they pressed their way,
Machine guns spat, but ne'er did stay
That gallant charge o'er No Man's Land,
Where war is hell, and hell is grand;

The dawn rose grey, when a British cheer
From the lofty ridge broke strong and clear;
It drowned the cowardly cry "Kamerade"
From the cowering Hun who feared the blade;

We marched them down through the oozing mud,
With the dead piled high, congealed in blood,
Those fiends of hell, they paved the way
From the conquered ridge in suits of grey;

But no one knows how the ridge was won;
Save those who faced the hated Hun
And our pals who rest beneath yon sod
Who lie in peace at rest with God.

In the silent depth of the Flanders mud
Made sacred by their own heart's blood
God rest their souls, and Heaven keep
Their loved ones, waiting across the deep."

Some new Western men have written well. Robert J. C. Stead, of Calgary, has given notable verses on "Kitchener", among others in his volume "Kitchener and Other Poems". This dirge strikes the chord of Empire:

KITCHENER.

Weep, waves of England. Nobler clay
  Was ne'er to nobler grave consigned;
The wild waves weep with us today
  Who mourn a nation's master mind.

We hoped an honored age for him,
  And ashes laid with England's great,
And rapturous music, and the dim
  Deep hush that veils our Tomb of State.

But this is better. Let him sleep
  Where sleep the men who made us free,
For England's heart is in the deep
  And England's glory is the sea;

One only vow above his bier—
  One only oath beside his bed—
We swear our flag shall shield him here
  Until the sea gives up its dead:

Leap, waves of England. Boastful be.
  And fling defiance in the blast
For earth is envious of the Sea,
  Which shelters England's dead at last."

James Mabon is a gentleman of Scottish birth who has lived a number of years in Saskatchewan. His poetic grasp of Western war problems is evident in

HAYSEED.

"Hayseed." That's what you called him,
With his overalls patched and worn,
And his get-up rather straggly,
And his buttons, somewhat forlorn.

And he stooped a bit in his walking,
Had naught of the martial stride,
And there were marks on his forehead
That his thick locks could not hide;

And his hands were hard and gnarled,
And you saw as he crossed the street,
That the binder twine and the laces
Were chums in the shoes of his feet;

And his open shirt-neck showed you
The bare throat ruddy and brown,
And you dubbed him "Hayseed,"
Taking your stroll uptown.

Perhaps he chewed and squinted
And "darned" not a little, "you bet,"
And you smiled in condescension
And, talked to your cigarette.

But he sent his boys to the trenches,
And his wife did the work of two,
Tho' you'll look pretty long for his record
In the pages of "Who is Who".

But Old Mother Earth keeps writings
For all the world to read,
The tale of Creation's Conscript
Whose life is a long brave deed.

And a cry comes up from the city,
And over the sleeping lea,
Rides on the wings of the tempest,
Sweeping the sundering sea.

Bearing the call of the hungry,
Ever the old refrain,
And the gnarled hands are lifted
And the back is bent again

And the wise man in his wisdom,
And the foolish in pride's disguise,
And the boy who fights for Freedom
With the God-light in his eyes,

And the rich man with his riches,
And the poor man at his toil,
Make, gladly, meek obeisance
To the Craftsman of the Soil.

Hyman Edelstein, a young Jew of Montreal, introduces one of the strangest notes of the incredible contest, when he voices the gratitude of Canadian Israel regarding the Restoration of Palestine,—the re-wedding of the Holy Land to the Chosen People,—in which indeed a number of our young Canadian soldiers took part:

ZION IS FREE!

From Lebanon comes a shout of glee,
And Carmel echoes long.
* * * * *
And Jordan sings with a newfound rhyme
And the valleys ring with the mingled chime,
As the trees whirl in a rustling dance,
Over the strange divine romance:
Shulamith and her lost are met—
Zion and Judah are lovers yet!

What saith the Jordan to the sea?
And thou, old Kishon, what aileth thee?
Why run the rivers with hurrying gait?
And what the tidings they relate
To the fields that can no longer wait,
And the woods that with wild joy vibrate?—

O it is the 'Earth of Israel' singing,
Which feels the tread of her children's feet,
And it is the shout of the strong hills ringing
Which thus their ancient tenant greet:
Zion is free! Zion is free!
My children, my children, come back to me!"

Yielding to the urgings of friends, I take the anthologist's privilege of inserting some lines of my own:

THE GALAHADS

* * * * *

Yet faint above the din, on ether borne,
A clear voice rang the ancient battle cries:
"Freedom and honor! truth and chivalry!
St. George, defend thy pledges unto death!
St. George, defend the weak, and save the world!"
And all true sons of Britain felt it vain
To live, unless as British knights of old,

Then lo! with reverence and pride we saw
The knights of old appear,—Sir Galahads,
None purer, none more brave. They had been known
Till then but as the schoolboys of the camps,
Carefree and merry, warming elder blood
By pranks of diving, reckless climbing feats
Up sheerest precipices. Trackless wilds
Knew them as tenters. The shy beaver heard
Their paddles unafraid. Widely they ranged
The peaks and dales uncharted, seeking risks
For love of danger and the jest with Death.

Yesterday they were children. Scarcely yet
Knew we they needed less our tender care,
Until some grave look or some manly deed
Warned us the soul was ripe. We pondered then.

So came the world's great need and Honor's call,
And silent, modest, up they rose to serve,—
Then in our wonder we beheld them men
And saw the Knights of Arthur's Table stand
Before us in their sacred panoply.
Little they said and naught delayed their going,
Farewells to launch, canoe, fair lake and range,
A tender word to mother, and forth they fared,
As thousands like them fared from lake and stream,
Crusaders of the Grail. Rude knights were some
But knightly all: God loves all faithful men.

Galahads of the camps! For this you learnt
The fearless life and strenuous company
Of the wild North, contempt of hurt and cold,
Joy of unmeasured contest, wit to meet
Emergency, deft skill and steady nerve.
What seemed but sport was training, and the best
Was inner,—loyal will and heart humane.
And in your battles you remembered oft
The mountains of the Land of Manitou.

Some shall return with honor, henceforth called
The heroes of the world. But where are those
Who shall never return?

Alas! to earthly eyes they sleep afar
In fields of glory famed to end of time.
Yet ever shall they clothe these leafy hills
With visions of the noblest deeds of men
And hold before Canadian youths to come
The quest eternal of the Holy Grail.

To treat of the part of the gallant French-Canadian Contingent in France would be to encroach on the field of the French Section of this Society. The glory of Talbot Papineau, of Major Roy, of Dumont Laviolette, and of the immortal 22nd, will assuredly be cherished in the Old Province in future years. I may, however, be permitted to quote one tribute to them by a French writer interested in Canada:—

'MONTREAL AU FRONT DE FRANCE.

by René d'Avril.

"Beaux et forts, l'œil hardi, cambrant leur haute taille
Affrontant les dangers trops connus,—la mitraille,
Les gaz, le froid, le chaud, la boue, et loin des leurs
Ne pensant qu'au pays dont flottent les couleurs,—
Pays qui les rassemble en un même uniforme:
Ils sont aux premiers rangs de cette lutte énorme;
Héros de bronze clair qu'envierait un sculpteur.

Ils ont quitté le sole du logis enchanteur.
Plus de rire d'enfants, sous le ciel gris de France
Mais l'attaque de nuit, l'implacable défense
Et la gloire qui passe en funèbre appareil

* * * * *

Ils sont du Canada, non loin de Montréal.....
Vaste image émergeant des brouillards de la Somme:
O grands lacs, O grands fleuves lents, grands champs de blé,
Pays ou tout est grand, même le cœur de l'homme!

(*Paris, Hôpital de l'Ecosse.*)

Captain Harwood Steele, of Winnipeg and the front, has written many clever poetic tributes to the Navy, and other lyrical descriptions of the great struggle. One of our most promising singers, he strikes a worthy note of Empire in

THE IMPERIAL ANTHEM

Lord God of hosts, Thy people cry to Thee,
Who smote for them, a path upon the sea.
Here at Thy feet, and looking still for aid
Kneeleth an Empire, great and unafraid.
Should foes appear, and war clouds darken man,
God of our sires, stand forward in our van.

Death crowned the fleet, that keeps our restless tide,
Death crowned the line, wherein our fathers died.
Strong in our faith, and bound to Thee alone,
Six nations one, we wait before Thy throne.
When in Thy name, we let the legions fly,
Lord God of Battles, hear their battle cry.

Then bound six-fold, by ties of blood and tears,
Shed each for each, through all our thousand years,
Under one King, our faces set to Thee,
Shall we be one, in peace eternally."

This has been set to excellent music by Mrs. de Lotbinière-Harwood, of Edmonton.

Having now taken a survey, more or less incomplete, of our war verse, we may try to measure its place and divine its future. In what qualities does it differ from the large and well-developed body of war poetry of the rest of the English speaking world? Two interesting comparisons are easily made. One is with the Anthology called "Poems of Today" in which some of the best things of the recent English poets regarding the war are collected: the other is with the "Poems and Songs of the South African War" brought together by the late Dr. J. D. Borthwick, (who was somewhat over liberal in his inclusions). The great South African contest looks today almost an excursion by the side of monstrous Armageddon, and the output of verse it occasioned might be contained in a leaflet. Yet on reflection, its national and even literary impulse was not negligible, and had a much larger result than is generally supposed. And it had a definite and close relation to, and influence upon, our part in Armageddon.

In technique, only a small part of our poetry of the present war compares with the product of such British writers as Kipling, Binyon, Masefield, Rupert Brooke, Henry Newbolt. And in volume, it is of

course but a little stream. Perhaps in both these respects—technique and volume—it may equal the work of the poets of the United States. But in three aspects it is unexcelled: no other verse is more bathed in the blood and agony of bitter struggle: none speaks from a soul of more uncompelled and undiluted chivalry; and none other proceeds specifically from our Canadian point of view, and so to speak courses directly in our national veins. It has indeed a notable relation to the whole present and subsequent revolution which the war is bringing, and is to bring, into the life of nations. All over the world these common impulses are taking form, and all humanity will surely aim at closer links of fraternity, mercy, justice and liberty and the attempt to establish a better world.

It is bound up, too, with the incoming tide of vital changes in the British Commonwealth. We have made it clear that the Empire is a living family, that all its people are our brethren, all its territory our country, its greatness our pride, its unity our concern, its organization one of our tasks, its future one of our grandest hopes. Those who have dreamed the British Commonwealth would fall apart have proved as foolish as those who proclaimed that chivalry is a myth.

The office of our war verse will be to apply the deep lessons of the struggle to the making of a better Canada as well as a more secure Empire. Racial passions, appetites for domination, ignorance, cowardice, materialistic ideals, will receive strong shocks from the forces of the new crusade; and the next generation will see many resultant changes in Canadian affairs. Few ideals are ever perfectly successful here below. But just as certainly, they form an enriching alloy when poured into the baser metal of the world: and just as certainly the world is advanced by each, to some extent. The law of conservation of moral energy is as valid and exact as the law of conservation of physical energy. None is ever lost. Whoever does a heroic deed, whoever enshrines it in a lyric line, have both achieved something immortal and eternal in their influence. The poets of Confederation had and will have a profound though noiseless influence. So will the War School. And as the war is a greater, wider, nobler event for us than Confederation, its influence will be so much the stronger.

But are those who have already written on the War the whole of our War School of Canadian poets? Are they not rather the precursors? In Pisgah view, I think I descry the real school as yet to come. The Confederation Poets came chiefly after Confederation. The War School will, I believe, appear chiefly after the war. Young men and women of genius—some probably returned from the contest—will celebrate its glorious deeds, will drink deep inspiration

from that brilliant band of heroes who are already beginning to render our circles illustrious with their presence, will develop the depths of feeling, the stirring calls to action, the picturesque adventures, the world-wide range of interests, the passion for true living, the insistent calls for a better people, for improved institutions, for a more dignified civilization, worthy of the new, hardwon tradition of Canadian valor, which is to go down to our children and children's children.

This is our Homeric Age. There never will be a greater fight. There never will be a vaster battlefield. There never will be richer experiences, more terrible shadows, more tragic trials, more glorious courage, more splendid triumphs, a higher tide of Empire, a worthier cause to live and die for.

The art of song cannot hurriedly attain to fit celebration of this epic period. The poets may perhaps not yet be born who shall invent utterances that shall be truly worthy of the innumerable heroic achievements, the Galahadic dedications to the supreme sacrifice, the wonderful idealism of the whole crusade. The story is too grand to be forgotten. It will sound the trumpet of the breast until it finds and calls out our supreme minstrel to supremely chant our Idylls of the Heroes.

E.M. 3-7-86

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